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ABSTRACT

If individualized learning is to benefit a large number of students, it must be simple and versatile enough for adaptation and implementation by the majority of classroom teachers. The program components and time allocations comprising the Do-It-Yourself Kit allow teachers to formulate their own individualized learning by selecting from and modifying the stated options and by assigning weights to subcategories. A description of the kit including its teacher checklists is provided. (Author/STS)

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DO-IT-YOURSELF KIT FOR INDIVIDUALIZED AND
INDEPENDENT LEARNING

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IR004 744

Do-It-Yourself Kit for Individualized and Independent Learning

If individualized learning is to benefit a large number of students, it must be simplified enough for adaptation and implementation by the majority of classroom teachers. Moreover, teachers should be able to make choices which reflect the degree to which they are ready to individualize. Many who favor the concept would implement more components which provide for the development of individual abilities if they could participate in program design.

The program components and time allocations listed below comprise a Do-It-Yourself Kit for the development of an individualized learning program. Teachers can formulate a program by making selections from the stated options and by assigning percentage weights to suggested subcategories. For example, an elementary school teacher may decide that 100% of the students in the class would work on the program for mathematics, but only 10% for reading. A program may begin with 90% of the student activities selected from a textbook, but be adapted to achieve a goal of 75% teacher-designed activities. Teachers may wish to add components, eliminate some of those suggested, and change numbers or the person assigned to a management task.

Rather than permit premature judgments over feasibility to govern their choices, teachers are advised to select options which are close to an "ideal" situation. Often, judgments about any one factor cannot be made until the entire program has been exposed. Evaluation of the most important components, recognition of gaps or contradictions, and degrees of teacher commitment are made after the program is in full

view. Above all, teachers are asked not to reject a favored component prematurely. In some cases a so-called "extreme" position is judged to be advisable when it is examined in conjunction with other factors. Designers should not expect to make final evaluations until they have had an opportunity to observe interrelationships and to compare components with chosen criteria.

Component # 1 is of special importance. Some teachers want a program to help students learn independently, but not to provide opportunities for them to learn different content or at different paces. This is an option. On the other hand, some teachers wish to design programs so that variable learning pace is a primary advantage of the system. One of the first decisions to be made concerns the purpose of the program. Will students learn some different things and develop different abilities or will expected performance be uniform? Will students learn given units in the same time periods? Will students be directed to develop learning independence?

Although independence can be regulated partially through decisions concerning movement within the classroom and selection of learning and search activities, a large degree of student independence is a necessary consequence of a decision that some students will be given opportunities to learn at faster and slower paces than others. Additional independence can be introduced into the program gradually to benefit both students and the teacher.

Program Components Intended for Variable Design by Teachers

Directions: Select one or more alternatives from each category or subcategory. In some cases percentages or numbers of activities or students can be designated.

1. Purpose

- a) independent learning without variation in pace or student activities
- b) individualized pace without variation in activities
- c) individualized pace, activities, and degrees of student independence

2. Student time commitment

- a) all or some students use the program
- b) all or some subject matter units are incorporated into the program

3. Student activities

- a) source: textbook, teacher-designed, commercially prepared, tapes
- b) abilities developed: subject matter skills, memory, creative thinking, logic, searching skills, . . .
- c) number of programs: one program for all students, more than one program
- d) types of activities: paper-pencil, games, manipulative, action in the real world; interdisciplinary; special interests; new learning, practice
- e) activities designed for enrichment or motivational "fun": for all students, for some students, for no students

4. Learning independence

- a) all or some students work alone
- b) students work with partners or in small groups for all or some activities
- c) students choose from given alternatives: activities, pace, places to learn

5. Approximate number of large group activities interspersed for instruction or for enjoyment

6. Personal assistance to stimulate questions and to remedy learning difficulties
 - a) students: top half or third of the class; students needing help ask student troubleshooter before asking the teacher; two or more troubleshooters assigned per day
 - b) teacher: classroom time for troubleshooting as required
 - c) older students and other adults
7. Delivery system for activities
 - a) successive activities in files or five activities per packet; accessible to students whenever they need them
 - b) ditto pages with indicated textbook activities, accessible to students
 - c) activities described on cards with materials in boxes, accessible to students
 - d) centers changed by the teacher, additional activities not accessible until the teacher substitutes materials in the centers
8. Student response to activities
 - a) written in spiral notebooks
 - b) written on loose pages and placed in a mailbox or file bearing the students' names
9. Movement within the classroom
 - a) students move to get activities from files and materials from cupboards
 - b) students do activities at desks, at centers, in places assigned for specific purposes, wherever the activity directs
 - c) troubleshooters move to students or students to troubleshooters
10. Testing
 - a) checked by the teacher: end of unit to determine whether or not the student proceeds to the next unit or does additional activities followed by a retest; standardized achievement tests (if not machine scored); diagnostic tests to place students at different places in the program added after the first year
 - b) checked by student checkers who are not troubleshooters: intermediate quizzes posted on the wall or accessible to students through a file, answer books available from the teacher's desk

11. Records

- a) students mark a wall chart to show completed activities
- b) teacher records performance on unit tests

12. Affective assessment of student satisfaction, awareness of what it means to learn, awareness of individual degree and variety of abilities

- a) brief teacher-made questionnaires per month or grading period
- b) direct teacher-student communication, one-to-one and in groups

13. Grading

- a) number of completed activities (individually paced)
- b) test scores and number of units where recycling was necessary
- c) other sources: observation of student oral questions, initiative, original activities, efforts on chosen complex tasks, ability to troubleshoot effectively

14. Activities checked

- a) all or some students check their own activities
- b) compared with answer book responses and/or for productive thinking according to the number and originality of responses

15. Time to instruct assistants: large or small groups

- a) students: troubleshooters, checkers, those who care for materials
- b) adults: the principal, aides, parents, custodians

16. Amount of teacher time involved

- a) time at school
- b) weekends, evenings, the summer prior to first semester of the program

17. Degree to which the program functions without on-the-spot teacher intervention: teachers delegate as many functions as possible to students so that they are free to do those tasks which only teachers can do and to assist those students personally who most need help, e.g. those with the most learning difficulties and those with outstanding gifts and talents

After teachers have selected program components, they need to make a calendar which indicates dates or the order in which each step of the program will be implemented. All components need not be introduced at the same time. Program components which involve students directly should be listed and distributed to them for reference. The list can be increased and amended according to teacher judgment and changing student needs.

Although optimal use of teacher time will not be achieved during the initial stages of the program, it is helpful for teachers to determine ultimate goals for their efforts. Since program design and the amount of time a teacher spends on given functions are interdependent, time allocations become part of the criteria for program choices. Teachers can designate priorities by assigning percentages of time to the functions listed below.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Teacher Functions</u>
_____	troubleshooting: time spent with a student on learning difficulties
_____	counseling: time spent with individual students concerning general progress
_____	development of student activities: time spent writing, selecting, or reproducing activities
_____	monitoring: time spent checking records
_____	informing: time spent orienting the large group
_____	directing: time spent working with small groups
_____	planning: time spent on tasks not included above
100%	total teacher time

It is an interesting experiment to compare the use of teacher-time within an individualized learning situation and within large group instructional programs.

A comparable evaluation exercise assigns time percentages or priorities to student involvement.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Student Function</u>
_____	receiving individual learning assistance from the teacher or other students
_____	giving help as troubleshooter, checker, materials organizer
_____	receiving counseling from the teacher
_____	doing learning activities independently or with a partner
_____	using a variety of materials in multiple experiences
_____	taking tests or quizzes
_____	marking records
_____	participating in group activities
_____	listening to teacher directions, reading management directions
_____	choosing or designing activities, asking questions
_____	other functions not listed above
100%	total student time

Through appropriate choices, teachers can design a program which gives individual students a wide range of opportunities. They can work with individuals during the time in which they formerly gave directions to large groups concerning learning activities, time to begin and end

activities, and problems met by students whose capacity did not fit the pace of the class. Moreover, they can provide a plentitude of one-of-a-kind materials since all students do not use the same materials at the same time.

If teachers accept the facts that much preliminary planning is required for an effective program and that the first semester or year in which the program functions probably will be less than optimal, then they will be pleased to find that perseverance produces unexpected dividends. After the initial steps have been implemented, teachers spend considerably less time on plans and materials. Moreover, students begin to function in new roles which help themselves, other students, and the teacher. All students need not develop independent and cooperative learning skills within a year to make a significant contribution to the improvement of classroom management and student opportunity. In spite of variable degrees of potential, the class as a group no longer depends on the teacher for minute-by-minute direction and maintenance. The teacher becomes nearly exempt from daily planning, large group testing, and paper checking.

Through the years competent teachers have organized learning environments. An educated conjecture is that most teachers have placed themselves in a role of program reproducer or implementor rather than as program designer. Yet the same teachers prefer program components which agree with their criteria for the best learning situation for children and for the best use of their abilities and resources.

Although ideas from institutional designs and from commercially prepared programs are helpful, the programs which are most effective are those which have the stamp of approval and personal touch of the teachers who use them.